

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 026 853 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

published in accordance with Art. 158(3) EPC

(43) Date of publication:

09.08.2000 Bulletin 2000/32

(51) Int. Cl.⁷: H04L 12/14, H04L 12/58,
G06F 13/00

(21) Application number: 99940522.8

(86) International application number:
PCT/JP99/04637

(22) Date of filing: 27.08.1999

(87) International publication number:

WO 00/13370 (09.03.2000 Gazette 2000/10)

(84) Designated Contracting States:

AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE

(30) Priority: 27.08.1998 JP 24231998

(71) Applicant:

NTT MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK
INC.

Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8436 (JP)

(72) Inventors:

• YAMAMOTO, Masaaki

Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa 235-0033 (JP)

• KOBAYASHI, Shinji

Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa 235-0033 (JP)

• YAKURA, Kenichi

Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa 222-0026 (JP)

• YAMAGUCHI, Kenichi,

3410, NTT Yagoto-ryo 411

Nagoya-shi, Aichi 468-0073 (JP)

(74) Representative: HOFFMANN - EITLE

Patent- und Rechtsanwälte

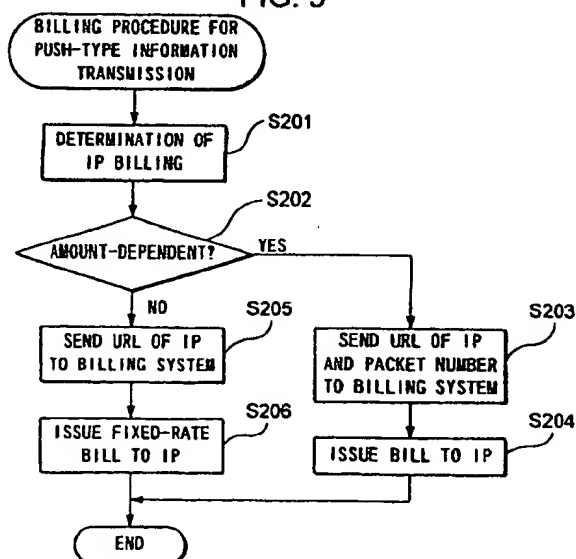
Arabellastrasse 4

81925 München (DE)

(54) CHARGING METHOD FOR INFORMATION COMMUNICATION NETWORK

(57) When an IP (Information Provider) server is accessed from a mobile station, a gateway server determines whether or not the IP server is to be IP billed (S101). If it is not to be IP billed, then user billing is applied. In this case, the gateway server sends a user management number of the mobile station and the number of exchanged packets to a billing system (S102). The billing system calculates a communication fee in accordance with the number of packets, and issues a bill to the user specified by the user management number (S103). On the other hand, if the accessed IP server is to be IP billed, then IP billing is applied. In this case, the gateway server sends the number of exchanged packets and the address of the accessed IP server to the billing system (S104). The billing system calculates a communication fee in accordance with the number of packets, and issues a bill to the IP (S105).

FIG. 9



Description

Technical Field

[0001] The present invention relates to a billing method for a communication network wherein a plurality of user terminals are provided information from a server device.

Background Art

[0002] Pull-type information transmission wherein a user accesses a server device of an information provider from a communication terminal such as a personal computer or the like to download desired information has been known conventionally in the field of information providing services which use the Internet.

[0003] Additionally, push-type information transmission wherein information is provided to the user from the server side without awaiting access by a user has been proposed in recent years.

[0004] Communication networks have become more complicated and diversified of late, so that the forms of networks in which various routers exist between the server device and the user terminal such as by interposing a gateway device between networks with different protocols have also increased.

Disclosure of the Invention

[0005] As the forms of networks diversify as described above, the types of services for information transmission are becoming various, and billing by communication fees or information fees is desired as appropriate to each type of service.

[0006] The present invention has been made in consideration of this type of situation, and has the purpose of offering a billing method for an information communication network capable of performing billing suited to the information transmission service type.

[0007] In order to resolve the above problem, a first aspect of the present invention is a billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from the server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between the server device and the user terminals; wherein the transfer device comprises:

a step of recording billing management information for identifying server devices which are to be subject to IP billing (IP billing means that charges for the information providing services are made not to users but to IP (Information Provider).);

a step of detecting a network address of the server device designated when the user terminal receives an information transmission from the server device;

a step of determining whether or not the server

device is to be subject to IP billing based on the detected network address and said billing management information; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which performed the information transmission if the server device is determined to be subject to IP billing.

[0008] Additionally, in the above-described first aspect of the present invention, the transfer device may be such as to not route an information transmission if it is determined not to be subject to IP billing.

[0009] Additionally, a second aspect of the present invention is a billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from the server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between the server device and the user terminals; wherein the server device comprises:

a step of including billing information which indicates whether or not to use IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider in the transmission data supplied to the user terminals in response to a request; and the transfer device comprises:

a step of determining whether or not the information transmission is subject to IP billing based on the billing information when routing the exchange of the transmission data; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which provided the information transmission if it is determined to be subject to IP billing.

[0010] Additionally, in either the above-mentioned first or second aspect of the present invention, the transfer device may be such as to perform a billing procedure with respect to users who have received the information transmission if it is determined not to be subject to IP billing.

[0011] Additionally, a third aspect of the present invention is a billing method in an information communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from the server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between the server device and the user terminals; wherein the transfer device comprises:

a mailbox for mediating push-type information transmission that is subject to IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider; and comprises:

a step of storing in the mailbox information mail sent from the server device designating a desired destination and the address of the mailbox;

a step of transmitting the information mail stored in the mailbox to user terminals which are the designated destinations; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which offered the information transmission with respect to push-type transmission services through the mailbox.

[0012] Additionally, a fourth aspect of the present invention is a billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from the server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between the server device and the user terminals; wherein said transfer device comprises

an IP-billed mailbox for mediating push-type information transmission that is subject to IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider; and

a user-billed mailbox for mediating information transmission that is not subject to IP billing; and performs a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which offered the information transmission with respect to push-type information transmission services through the IP-billed mailbox; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the user that received the information transmission with respect to information transmission services through the user-billed mailbox.

[0013] Additionally, in the present invention, the object of the billing may be a communication fee with respect to communication services for the information transmission or may be an information fee with respect to information provided by the information transmission.

[0014] Additionally, the transfer device may be such as to perform a billing procedure of information fees with respect to users if it is determined as not being subject to IP-billing, and otherwise not perform a billing procedure of information fees.

[0015] Additionally, in the present invention, the server device may belong to a first communication network following a first communication protocol and the plurality of user terminals belong to a second communication network following a second communication protocol different from that of the first communication network; and the transfer device may be a gateway for converting between the first and second communication protocols and routing information transmissions.

[0016] Additionally, in the present invention, the second communication network may be a local network accommodating specific user terminals; and the first communication network may be a global network interconnecting information resources such as the server device assigned identification information for identifying

an absolute network address.

[0017] Additionally, in the present invention, the second communication network may be a mobile communication network accommodating a plurality of user terminals which are mobile terminals, and the first communication network may be the Internet.

Best Modes for Carrying Out the Invention

[0018] Herebelow, an embodiment of the present invention shall be explained with reference to the drawings. This embodiment is structured as a system wherein the present invention is applied to a mobile packet communication network. The present invention is not restricted to the following embodiment, and various modifications are possible within the range of the technical concept thereof.

A: Structure of Embodiment

(1) Overall Structure of System

[0019] Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing an embodiment of the present invention.

[0020] In the drawing, MS denotes a mobile station which receives packet communication services from a mobile packet communication network MPN. This mobile station MS is connected not only to the mobile packet communication network MPN shown in the drawing, but also to a mobile telephone network which is not shown, and is therefore capable of receiving mobile telephone services as well. The mobile station MS comprises an voice input-output portion for a user to perform voice communications, a radio portion for performing radio communications with a base station BS, an information display portion comprising a liquid crystal panel or the like and an operating portion where information input operations such as number input and character input are performed, and also has an internal microcomputer for controlling these parts. Additionally, the mobile station MS has software (i.e. a browser) for browsing HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) document data (hereinafter referred to as HTML data), and displays an interactive screen for the user based on HTML data supplied from an information provider (hereinafter abbreviated to IP) via a mobile packet communication network.

[0021] Additionally, the mobile packet communication network MPN comprises a base station BS, a packet processing module PS, a gateway server GWS, a subscriber database UDB, a billing system BILL and a communication line for connecting these elements.

[0022] The base stations BS are positioned at predetermined intervals obtained by dividing the ground into ranges of e.g. a radius of 500 m, and perform radio communications with mobile stations MS visiting the radio zones formed thereby.

[0023] The packet processing module PS is a com-

puter system provided in a packet switching center accommodating a plurality of base stations BS, which receives packet switching requests from the mobile stations MS (packet switching service registration to be explained below), and performs the switching of packets in the mobile packet communication network.

[0024] The gateway server GWS is a computer system provided in a mobile packet gateway switching center for interconnecting the mobile packet communication network MPN with other networks such as the Internet INET, which converts communication protocols which differ between the networks. Specifically, conversions are made between the transmission protocol for mobile packet communications networks used by the mobile packet communication network MPN and the TCP/IP used in other networks such as the Internet INET. Additionally, the gateway server GWS works in cooperation with the IP server W, the subscriber database UDB and the billing system BILL to perform control relating to the various applications, such as information providing services and billing procedures for information transmission.

[0025] The subscriber database UDB stores a subscriber registration information file composed of information relating to subscribers of the mobile packet communication network MPN and an IP registration information file composed of registration information of the IP (Information Provider). Fig. 2 is a data format diagram showing an example of the content of this subscriber database UDB. As shown in the drawing, the subscriber registration information file contains attribute data indicating the attributes of each subscriber such as the telephone number of the mobile station MS, name, sex, birthdate and address for each subscriber (i.e. the user of the mobile station MS) in the mobile packet communication network MPN. Additionally, the IP registration information file contains the company name and the absolute address on the network (e.g. in the case of the Internet, the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) which specifies the information resources on the WWW (World Wide Web); herebelow, the absolute network address in the present embodiment shall be referred to as the URL), information indicating whether the type of billing is IP billing or not, and information indicating whether the type of billing depends on the amount or is fixed-rate, for each IP which is contracted to receive gateway services with the company which runs this mobile packet communication network MPN. Here, IP billing refers to billing for information transmissions service which is performed not with respect to the user who received the transmission service, but with respect to the information provider. On the other hand, billing with respect to the user shall hereinafter be referred to as user billing.

[0026] The billing system BILL calculates the fees for the providing of services based on service history information supplied from the gateway server, and issues a bill to the user or the IP. While billing types

include user billing and IP billing as well as amount-dependent and fixed-rate, the billing system BILL performs billing in accordance with each billing type.

[0027] The IP server W is a server system run by the IP, which sends information to be provided to the users over a network in an HTML data format. The IP server W can be connected to the gateway server GWS via an exclusive line or the Internet INET, can be provided inside the gateway server GWS which is provided by the owner of the mobile packet communication network MPN (hereafter referred to as an IP server W-MAX).

(2) Structure of Gateway Server

[0028] Next, the structure of the gateway server GWS shall be explained. Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing the structure of a gateway server GWS. In the drawing, the gateway server GWS comprises a system control portion I-MAX, a user information managing portion U-MAX, a billing managing portion P-MAX, an electronic mail managing portion M-MAX, an IP server W-MAX and a bus BUS for connecting these parts.

[0029] The system control portion I-MAX controls the various portions of the gateway server GWS, and functions as an interface between networks such as by performing protocol conversion between the mobile packet communication network MPN and other networks such as the Internet INET.

[0030] The user information managing portion U-MAX stores and manages subscriber registration information and IP registration information obtained by referencing the subscriber database UDB, as well as the correspondence between telephone numbers of the mobile stations and user management numbers (to be explained below) and the access histories of users to the IP server W (for example, the number of accesses to each IP server). Additionally, the user information managing portion U-MAX performs conversions between the telephone numbers and user management number, collation of telephone numbers and comparison of attribute data based on the above stored information.

[0031] The billing managing portion P-MAX records and manages information necessary for billing with respect to the information transmission services, and supplies this information to the billing system BILL. Specifically, it stores the fact that an electronic mail has been received from the IP server W as history information, calculates the number of packets to be exchanged when transmitting the electronic mail to the user, and stores this calculated value. Additionally, the billing managing portion P-MAX references the content of the subscriber database UDB transferred to the user information managing portion U-MAX, in order to determine whether or not the billing type for each IP is IP billing, and whether or not it is amount-dependent, then requests billing to the billing system BILL based on the billing type.

[0032] The electronic mail managing portion M-MAX mediates the exchange of electronic mail between mobile station MS users, between mobile station MS users and users of other networks such as the Internet INET, or between the mobile station MS users and the IP server W. This electronic mail managing portion M-MAX is provided with mailboxes for storing the electronic mails to be transferred for each user or for each IP server W. There are three types of mailboxes in accordance with the type of mail service, and these being distinguished by the addresses of their mailboxes (mail addresses).

(i) A first mailbox BOX1 is a conventional mailbox wherein the electronic mail transferred between users is stored at mail addresses assigned for each user.

(ii) Next, a second mailbox BOX2 is a mailbox for storing electronic mail transmitted from the IP to specific users for the purposes of providing information or the like. Here, a specific user is a user who has already completed registration procedures with respect to the IP. This second mailbox BOX2 is used in a first type of service due to push-type information transmission to be described below.

(iii) Next, a third mailbox BOX3, as with the second mailbox BOX2, is a mailbox for storing electronic mail transmitted from the IP to a user for the purposes of providing information. It differs from the second mailbox BOX2 in that instead of storing electronic mail provided to users which have been pre-registered in the IP, it stores electronic mail provided to users having attributes (attributes such as sex, age, address, etc.) designated by the IP. This third mailbox BOX3 is used in a second type of service due to push-type information transmission to be described below.

[0033] The IP server W-MAX is a server system provided by the company owning the mobile packet communication network MPN. This IP server W-MAX, like the other IP server W, performs services such as providing information to the users.

B. Operations of the Embodiment

[0034] Next, operations of the embodiment having the above-described structure shall be explained.

[0035] First, information transmission shall be explained, followed by an explanation of the billing procedures.

B-1. Information Transmission

[0036] With regard to the information transmission according to the present embodiment, there is pull-type information transmission in which the user of a mobile station MS receives information transmissions by

accessing the IP server W, and push-type information transmission in which information transmission is performed from the IP server W side to specified or non-specified users without waiting for user access. Herebelow, the explanation shall be given separately for these types.

(1) Pull-type Information Transmission

[0037] Fig. 4 is a sequence showing a basic operation for pull-type information transmission.

[0038] As shown in the drawing, the mobile station MS performs a packet switching service registration in cooperation with the packet processing module PS (step S1). The packet switching service registration is a preliminary registration procedure for enabling packet switching in a mobile packet communication network MPS. When this packet switching service registration is completed, the mobile station MS sends a line connection request signal to the mobile packet communication network MPS (step S2). This line connection request signal is sent through the packet processing module PS to the gateway server GWS (step S3). If a line connection is possible, then the gateway server GWS sends a line connection response signal through the packet processing module PS back to the mobile station MS (steps S4, S5). As a result, packet switching becomes possible between the mobile station MS and the gateway server GWS.

[0039] Next, the mobile station MS sends a connection request signal designating the URL of a desired IP server W (step S6). This connection request signal is routed through the packet processing module PS and sent to the gateway server GWS (step S7). The gateway server GWS receives the connection request signal, and establishes a link with the IP server W of the designated URL (step S8).

[0040] When a link has been established with the gateway server GWS in this way, the IP server W sends HTML data which has been prepared beforehand to the mobile station MS (step S9). This HTML data is routed through the gateway server GWS and transferred to the packet processing module PS (step S10). Furthermore, at the packet processing module PS, the received HTML data is transferred to the mobile station MS (step S11).

[0041] The operations of the above steps S6-S11 are repeatedly performed in accordance with the amount of all of the data to be transmitted from the IP server W to the mobile station MS. At this time, the mobile station MS interprets sequentially transmitted HTML data by means of the browser and displays the received information at the information display portion.

[0042] When the data transmission to the mobile station MS has been completed, the mobile station MS sends an acknowledgement signal (step S12). The packet processing module PS transfers this acknowledgement signal to the gateway server GWS so as to

make a delivery notification (step S13). When the IP server W completes the data transmission to the mobile station MS, the link between the gateway server GWS and the IP server W is released (step S14).

[0043] Additionally, when there is a data delivery notification from the mobile station MS to the gateway server GWS, the gateway server GWS performs a billing procedure with respect to the information transmission. The billing procedure performed at this time shall be described in detail below.

(2) Push-type Information Transmission

[0044] First, the basic operations of the push-type information transmission shall be explained, followed by explanations of two types of services due to push-type information transmission.

(i) Basic Operations of Push-type Information Transmission

[0045] Fig. 5 is a sequence diagram illustrating the basic operations of push-type information transmission.

[0046] In the drawing, an IP server W first sends information to be provided to users to the gateway server GWS in the form of electronic mail (step S21). When the gateway server GWS receives the electronic mail, it stores this in the designated mailbox and sends a communication start notification signal to the packet processing module PS (step S22). This communication start notification signal includes information designating the destination address of the electronic mail. When the packet processing module PS receives this communication start notification signal, it calls the mobile station MS corresponding to the destination address included in the signal (step S23).

[0047] When the user of the mobile station MS performs a specified operation on the mobile station MS in response to the call, the same sequence as the above-described steps S1-S5 (shown in Fig.4) is performed, and it enters a state of being capable of packet switching with the gateway server GWS (steps S24-S28). Next, the gateway server GWS sends a reception notification signal including the address information of the mailbox in which the electronic mail is stored to the packet processing module PS (step S29). Furthermore, the packet processing module PS sends the received reception notification signal to the mobile station MS (step S30).

[0048] Upon receiving the above-described reception notification signal, the mobile station MS sends a connection request signal designating the address of the mailbox included in the reception notification signal to the packet processing module PS (step S31). This connection request signal is transferred through the packet processing module PS to the gateway server GWS (step S32). Upon receiving the connection request signal, the gateway server GWS sends a con-

nection acknowledgement signal to the packet processing module PS (step S33). The packet processing module PS sends the received connection acknowledgement signal to the mobile station MS (step S34).

[0049] Next, the gateway server GWS reads the electronic mail received from the IP server W from the mailbox whose address is designated in the connection request signal, and transfers the electronic mail to the packet processing module PS (step S35). Upon receiving the electronic mail, the packet processing module PS sends this mail to the mobile station MS which issued the connection request (step S36).

[0050] The operations of the above steps S31-S36 are repeatedly performed in accordance with the amount of data in the electronic mail to be transmitted from the IP server W to the mobile station MS.

[0051] When the mobile station MS has received the electronic mail in this way, a delivery notification is sent to the gateway server GWS in the same manner as in steps S12 and S13 shown in Fig.4 (steps S37, S38), and the push-type information transmission is completed.

[0052] Additionally, if there is a data delivery notification from the mobile station MS to the gateway server GWS, then the gateway server GWS performs a billing procedure with respect to the information transmission. The billing procedure performed at this time shall be described in detail below.

(ii) First Type of Service by means of Push-type Information Transmission

[0053] In the present embodiment, there are two types of services by means of push-type information transmission. A first type shall now be described.

[0054] The first type is a service of transmitting electronic mail from the IP server for the purpose of providing certain information to users who have completed a registration procedure with the IP beforehand, wherein the electronic mail is stored in the second mailbox BOX2, and the electronic mail is transmitted in response to a user request after the user has been called.

[0055] Fig. 6 is a conceptual diagram for explaining the first type. In this drawing, a user who desires services such as information provision of a specific IP operates a mobile station MS to access the network and performs preliminary registration procedures with respect to the IP server (step S61). With this access, the subscriber number of the user (i.e. the telephone number of the mobile station MS) is transferred to the gateway server GWS. The gateway server GWS converts the received subscriber number into a user management number which is user identity information having a one-to-one correspondence with the telephone number in the user information managing portion U-MAX in order to avoid the telephone number being sent outside the packet communication network MPN. This

user management number is sent from the gateway server GWS to the IP server W, and is stored in the IP server W as user registration information (step S62).

[0056] Then, if the IP server W has information to be provided to a registered user, the IP server W 5 arranges the information as transmission data in the form of electronic mail, appends to the electronic mail the address of the second mailbox BOX2 and the user management number of the registered user to which the information is to be provided, and sends the mail to the gateway server GWS (step S63).

[0057] When the gateway server GWS receives the electronic mail from the IP server W, it stores the mail in the second mailbox BOX2 of the electronic mail managing portion M-MAX, and converts the designated user 10 management number to the corresponding telephone number in the user information managing portion U-MAX, and calls the mobile station MS of that telephone number (step S64).

[0058] If the user of the mobile station MS who has received this call desires to receive the information provided by the IP server, the user operates the mobile station MS to access the gateway server GWS and requests a download of the electronic mail (step S65). The download request signal sent to the gateway server 15 GWS at this time contains the telephone number of the mobile station MS which is the source of the request. The gateway server GWS compares the telephone number of the mobile station MS from which the request signal is originated and the telephone number corresponding to the user management number designated by the IP server W at the time of reception of the electronic mail in the user information managing portion U-MAX, thereby judging whether or not to permit access to the second mailbox BOX2, and thereafter reads the 20 electronic mail from the mailbox BOX2 and sends it to the mobile station MS (steps S66, S67).

[0059] In this way, it is possible to provide information to specific users registered with the IP server W.

(iii) Second Type of Service by means of Push-type Information Transmission

[0060] Next, the second type shall be explained. The second type is a service whereby electronic mail sent from the IP server for the purposes of providing information to users having attributes (attributes such as sex, age and address) designated by the IP server is stored in a third mailbox BOX3, and the electronic mail is transmitted to relevant users in response to user requests after they have been called.

[0061] Fig. 7 is a conceptual diagram for explaining a second type. In the drawing, users who are prepared to receive services such as information provision from an unspecified IP operate the mobile station MS to 50 access the network, and perform preliminary registration procedures with respect to the gateway server GWS (step S71). With this access, the telephone

number of the mobile station MS is transferred to the gateway server GWS, and this is stored in the user information managing portion U-MAX of the gateway server GWS as user registration information.

[0062] Then, if the IP server W has information to be provided to users, the IP server W arranges the information in electronic mail form, appends attribute data such as sex, age and address for specifying the user to the electronic mail, and sends the mail to the gateway server GWS (step S72).

[0063] When the gateway server GWS receives the electronic mail containing the attribute data from the IP server W, it stores the electronic mail in the third mailbox BOX3, and in the user information managing portion U-MAX, compares the attribute data appended to the electronic mail with the attribute data of each user registered in the subscriber database UDB in order to specify relevant users. For example, if the attributes designated by the IP server W are "men in the thirties who live in Tokyo", then a search is made for relevant users having these attributes from among the users registered in the subscriber database UDB, and the telephone number of those users are extracted. The gateway server GWS calls the mobile stations MS of the telephone numbers 20 extracted in this way (step S73).

[0064] If the user of a mobile station MS called in this way wishes to receive the information provided by the IP server, the user operates the mobile station MS to access the gateway server GWS, and requests a download of electronic mail (step S74). At this time, the telephone number of the mobile station MS which is the source of the request is appended to the download request signal sent to the gateway server GWS. The gateway server GWS, in the user information managing portion U-MAX, compares the telephone number of the mobile station MS from which the request signal is originated with the telephone numbers of users who have completed the above-described registration procedure in order to judge whether or not to permit access to the third mailbox BOX3, after which it reads the electronic mail from the third mailbox BOX3 and sends it to the mobile station MS which made the request (steps S75, 30 S76).

[0065] In this way, it is possible for the IP server W to perform an information providing service to users who desire the provision of information from among users who are prepared to receive information from the unspecified IP server W.

B-2: Billing Procedure

[0066] While types of billing include communication fee billing for communication services and information fee billing for information providing services of IP's, communication fee billing shall be explained as an example in the present embodiment.

[0067] Additionally, the billing procedures for the present invention include user billing with respect to

users who have been provided information and IP (Information Provider) billing for billing the IP's who have provided the information. In the present embodiment, whether to perform user billing or IP billing is managed by different methods for the case of pull-type information transmission and push-type information transmission. Both cases shall be explained below.

(1) In the Case of Pull-type Information Transmission

[0068] Generally, in the case of pull-type information transmission, the information is provided in accordance with a request from the user, so that user billing is more readily applicable. However, there are cases in which the IP wishes to provide information free in response to requests from unspecified users for the purposes of advertisement or the like, and in this case, IP billing is more readily applicable. Therefore, in the present embodiment, in the case of pull-type information transmission, user billing is applied in principle and in exceptional cases where IP billing is to be applied, the IP which is subject thereto is pre-registered in the subscriber database UDB. Then, the gateway server GWS extracts from the subscriber database UDB a list of URL's of IP servers W to which IP billing is to be applied, and stores it in a memory in the billing managing portion P-MAX as an IP-billing list table.

[0069] Fig. 8 is a flow chart showing the billing procedure for pull-type information transmission. In this drawing, the user first operates the mobile station MS to access a designated IP server W, and upon receiving a delivery acknowledgement signal from the user, the gateway server GWS checks whether or not the URL of the IP server W accessed by the user corresponds to an IP to be IP billed as listed in the above-described table (step S101).

[0070] Here, if it is not an IP sever to be IP-billed, then user billing is applied as usual. In this case, the billing managing portion P-MAX of the gateway GWS sends a user management number of the user who received the information transmission and the sum of received packet numbers to the billing system BILL (step S102). The billing system BILL calculates a communication fee by multiplying the sum of packets supplied from the gateway server GWS with a unit price, and issues a bill to the user specified by the user management number (step S103).

[0071] On the other hand, if the URL of the IP server W accessed by the user corresponds to an IP to be IP-billed, then IP billing is applied. In this case, the billing managing portion P-MAX of the gateway server GWS sends the sum of the received packets and the URL of the IP server W which was accessed to the billing system BILL (step S104). The billing system BILL calculates the communication fee by multiplying the sum of packets supplied from the gateway server GWS with a unit price, and issues a bill to the IP (step S105).

(2) In the Case of Push-type Information Transmission

[0072] Next, the billing procedure for the case of push-type information transmission shall be described. Fig. 9 is a flow chart showing a billing procedure for the case of push-type information transmission. In the drawing, when the gateway server GWS receives electronic mail from the IP server W in the second mailbox BOX2 or the third mailbox BOX3, it recognizes that there has been an order for push-type information transmission, and decides to apply IP billing (step S201). That is, in the case of push-type information transmission, IP billing is more readily applicable to this type of information transmission, so that in the present embodiment, IP billing is always applied.

[0073] Next, the gateway server GWS specifies the user to which information is to be provided as described above, then calls the mobile station MS to transmit the electronic mail received from the IP server to the mobile station MS, but in the case of IP billing, user billing is not performed with respect to this transmission, and the IP is billed for everything.

[0074] In this case, the billing managing portion P-MAX of the gateway server GWS references the IP registration information stored in the subscriber database UDB, and checks whether the type of billing to be applied to the IP server W is amount-dependent or fixed-rate (step S202).

[0075] If the billing type is amount-dependent, the billing managing portion P-MAX of the gateway server GWS sends the sum of the packets exchanged in the transmission of electronic mail and the URL of the IP server W which was the source of the electronic mail to the billing system BILL (step S203). The billing system BILL multiplies the sum of the packets supplied from the gateway server GWS with a unit price to calculate the communication fee, and issues a bill to the IP (step S204).

[0076] On the other hand, if the billing type is fixed-rate, then the billing managing portion P-MAX of the gateway server GWS sends the URL of the IP server W to the billing system BILL at the same time as the electronic mail is received from the IP server, so as to order billing to that IP (step S205). The billing system BILL receives this and issues a bill of a standard amount to the indicated IP (step S206).

[0077] If the fixed-rate billing format is one where billing is applied to a standard period of time such as by monthly units, the IP is billed whether or not the electronic mail from the IP server W reaches the gateway server GWS. Therefore, in this case, there is no cooperation between the gateway server GWS and the billing system BILL, and the billing system BILL independently issues a bill to the IP at regular periods.

C: Modification Examples

[0078] As previously mentioned, the present inven-

tion is not restricted to the above-described embodiments. The present invention can have various modifications within the range of the technical concept of the present invention, for example the following.

(1) In the embodiments, information is provided to mobile stations MS belonging to a mobile packet communication network MPN from another network such as the Internet INET (first communication network), but if for example there exists another global network which can replace the Internet INET, then the present invention is applicable to cases wherein information is provided from such a network to a mobile station MS belonging to a mobile packet communication network MPN. In this case, the information resource of the IP server W can be specified by means of an absolute address defined in the global network to which it is applied, instead of by a URL.

Additionally, the network (second communication network) to which the user terminal belongs is not restricted to being a mobile packet communication network MPN, and the invention is applicable for providing information to user terminals belonging to local networks such as fixed network which includes stationary terminals.

Furthermore, the present invention is not restricted to packet switching networks, and is applicable to data communication networks which perform other types of data communications, and the communication protocols indicated in the embodiments represent only one possible example. Additionally, the form of the data transmitted from the IP server is not restricted to HTML format, and other formats may be employed. For example, if the transmitted information is only text data, then it is of course not necessary to employ a data format such as HTML which can handle multimedia.

(2) In the embodiments, the communication fee billing for pull-type information transmission was uniformly made amount-dependent, but the present invention is not limited thereto, so that it is possible to register information indicating whether amount-dependent or fixed-rate in the subscriber database UDB as in the case of push-type information transmission, and to perform billing procedures in accordance with the type of billing. In the case that a fixed-rate system is employed for pull-type information transmission, the user or IP is billed a standard amount regardless of the number of exchanged packets, as in the case of push-type information transmission.

Additionally, while the billing type was set for each IP in the IP registration file of the subscriber database UDB in the embodiments, the present invention is not restricted thereto, and it is possible to set for each user in the subscriber registration file. Additionally, when wishing to set the billing type

according to the IP and the user, then the billing type for each user can be set for each IP in the IP registration information file, or the billing type for each IP can be set for each user in the subscriber registration information file.

(3) While only communication fee billing was explained in the embodiments for the purpose of retaining simplicity, the present invention can be similarly applied to information fee billing. However, when employing amount-dependent information fee billing, billing does not depend on the number of exchanged packets as in communication fee billing, but it is possible to apply various billing types such as for example, billing in accordance with the number of exchanged electronic mails or when wishing to change the amount depending on the case, appending amount information concerning a mail transmission to the electronic mail sent from the IP server W to send to the gateway server GWS.

Additionally, in the case of information fee billing, it is possible to perform only user billing and to not perform IP billing. In this case, all of the billing types in the IP registration information file in the subscriber database UDB can be set to user billing or the billing procedure can be not performed with respect to IP's which are set for IP billing.

(4) In the embodiments, the billing type in pull-type information transmission was decided by the gateway server GWS having a list table of IP-billing and referencing the table, but the present invention is not restricted thereto, and it is possible for example to append information indicating whether IP billing or not by adding a tag to the HTML data sent from the IP server W, and to have the gateway server GWS decide the billing type based on this information.

(5) The structure of the network in the embodiments is no more than one possible example, and the present invention is not restricted to such a structure. For example, it is possible to divide up the functions among a plurality of nodes such as by arranging into divisions of nodes having a communication protocol converting function and nodes having other functions.

(6) In the embodiments, the IP server W manages user registration information with respect to the IP's in a first type of service by means of push-type information transmission, but the present invention may be such that the gateway server GWS handles the management of user registration information. For example, as shown in Fig. 10, among the dialog screens displayed when a user performs registration procedures with the IP, it is possible to send and display only a dialog screen (hereafter referred to as a registration screen) for aiding in the registration operation as HTML data prepared by the gateway server GWS to the mobile station MS of the

user, then store and manage the user registration information at the gateway server GWS based on the user registration procedures. In this case, it is possible for the gateway server GWS to find which IP server W the user has performed registration procedures, based on the address information such as the URL designated when the user accesses the IP server W. Therefore, if the gateway server GWS has HTML data for providing a registration screen with respect to a plurality of IP servers W in correspondence to the address information such as the URL, then it is possible to specify the HTML data to be sent to the mobile station MS of the user as a registration screen based on the address information such as the URL designated by the user.

(7) While in the embodiments, in the case of push-type information transmission, the user of a mobile station MS who has received a call for electronic mail operates the mobile station MS to access the gateway server GWS and download the electronic mail, but the present invention is not restricted thereto, and it is possible to make the process such that when the mobile station MS receives a call, it automatically accesses the gateway server GWS and downloads the electronic mail without waiting for the instruction operations of the user.

(8) In the embodiments, IP billing is always used for push-type information transmission, but the present invention is not restricted thereto, and user billing can also be applied in the case of push-type information transmission. In this case, as with the pull-type information transmission described above, an IP billing list table should be made based on the set contents of a subscriber database UDB, this table should be referenced in order to determine whether to use IP billing or user billing, and in the case of user billing, the procedures appropriate for user billing should be followed.

[0079] Additionally, even in the case of exclusively IP billing, it is possible to prepare an IP billing list table for having a list of relevant IP servers to be IP-billed, so that when there is a request for push-type information transmission from an IP server not listed in this table, the information transmission will not be routed such as by disposing of the sent electronic mail.

Claims

1. A billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from said server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between said server device and said user terminals; wherein said transfer device comprises:

a step of recording billing management infor-

mation for identifying server devices which are to be subject to IP billing which is billing with respect to information providers;

a step of detecting a network address of said server device designated when said user terminal receives an information transmission from said server device;

a step of determining whether or not said server device is to be subject to IP billing based on the detected network address and said billing management information; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which performed the information transmission if said server device is determined to be subject to IP billing.

2. A billing method as recited in claim 1, wherein said transfer device does not route an information transmission if it is determined not to be subject to IP billing.

3. A billing method as in claim 1, wherein said transfer device performs a billing procedure with respect to users who have received the information transmission if it is determined not to be subject to IP billing.

4. A billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from said server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between said server device and said user terminals; wherein said server device comprises:

a step of including billing information which indicates whether or not to use IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider in the transmission data supplied to said user terminals in response to a request; and said transfer device comprises:

a step of determining whether or not said information transmission is subject to IP billing based on said billing information when routing the exchange of said transmission data; and a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which provided said information transmission if it is determined to be subject to IP billing.

5. A billing method as in claim 4, wherein said transfer device performs a billing procedure with respect to users who have received the information transmission if it is determined not to be subject to IP billing.

6. A billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information

from said server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between said server device and said user terminals; wherein said transfer device comprises:

a mailbox for mediating push-type information transmission that is subject to IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider; and comprises:

a step of storing in said mailbox information mail sent from said server device designating a desired destination and the address of said mailbox;

a step of transmitting the information mail stored in said mailbox to user terminals which are the designated destinations; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which offered said information transmission with respect to push-type transmission services through said mailbox.

7. A billing method in a communication network including an information provider server device, a plurality of user terminals which receive information from said server device and a transfer device for routing information transmission between said server device and said user terminals; wherein said transfer device comprises:

an IP-billed mailbox for mediating push-type information transmission that is subject to IP billing which is billing with respect to the information provider; and

a user-billed mailbox for mediating information transmission that is not subject to IP billing; and performs a billing procedure with respect to the information provider which offered said information transmission with respect to push-type information transmission services through said IP-billed mailbox; and

a step of performing a billing procedure with respect to the user that received said information transmission with respect to information transmission services through said user-billed mailbox.

8. A billing method as in any one of claims 1-7, wherein the object of said billing is a communication fee with respect to communication services for the information transmission.

9. A billing method as in any one of claims 1-7, wherein the object of said billing is an information fee with respect to information provided by the information transmission.

10. A billing method as in claim 9, wherein said transfer

device performs a billing procedure of information fees with respect to users if it is determined as not being subject to IP-billing, and otherwise does not perform a billing procedure of information fees.

11. A billing method as in any one of claims 1-7, characterized in that said server device belongs to a first communication network following a first communication protocol and said plurality of user terminals belong to a second communication network following a second communication protocol different from that of said first communication network; and

said transfer device is a gateway for converting between said first and second communication protocols and routing information transmissions.

12. A billing method as in claim 11, wherein said second communication network is a local network accommodating specific user terminals; and

said first information communication network is a global network interconnecting information resources such as said server device assigned identification information for identifying an absolute network address.

13. A billing method as in claim 12, wherein said second communication network is a mobile communication network accommodating a plurality of user terminals which are mobile terminals, and

said first information communication network is the Internet.

FIG. 1

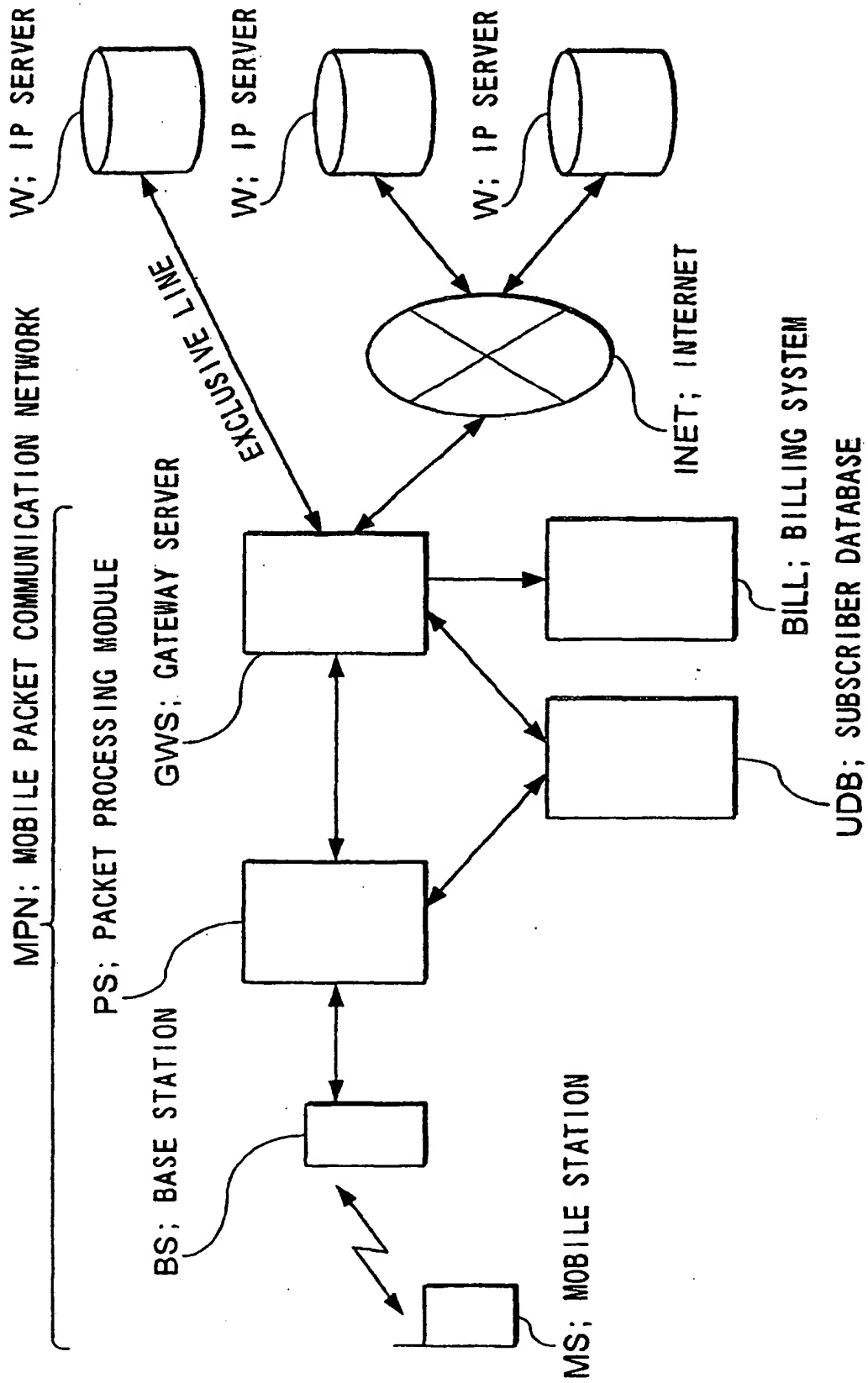


FIG. 2

SUBSCRIBER REGISTRATION INFORMATION FILE

TELEPHONE NUMBER	NAME	SEX	BIRTHDATE	ADDRESS
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

IP REGISTRATION INFORMATION FILE

COMPANY NAME	URL	IP BILLING/USER BILLING	AMOUNT-DEPENDENT/FIXED-RATE
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

FIG. 3

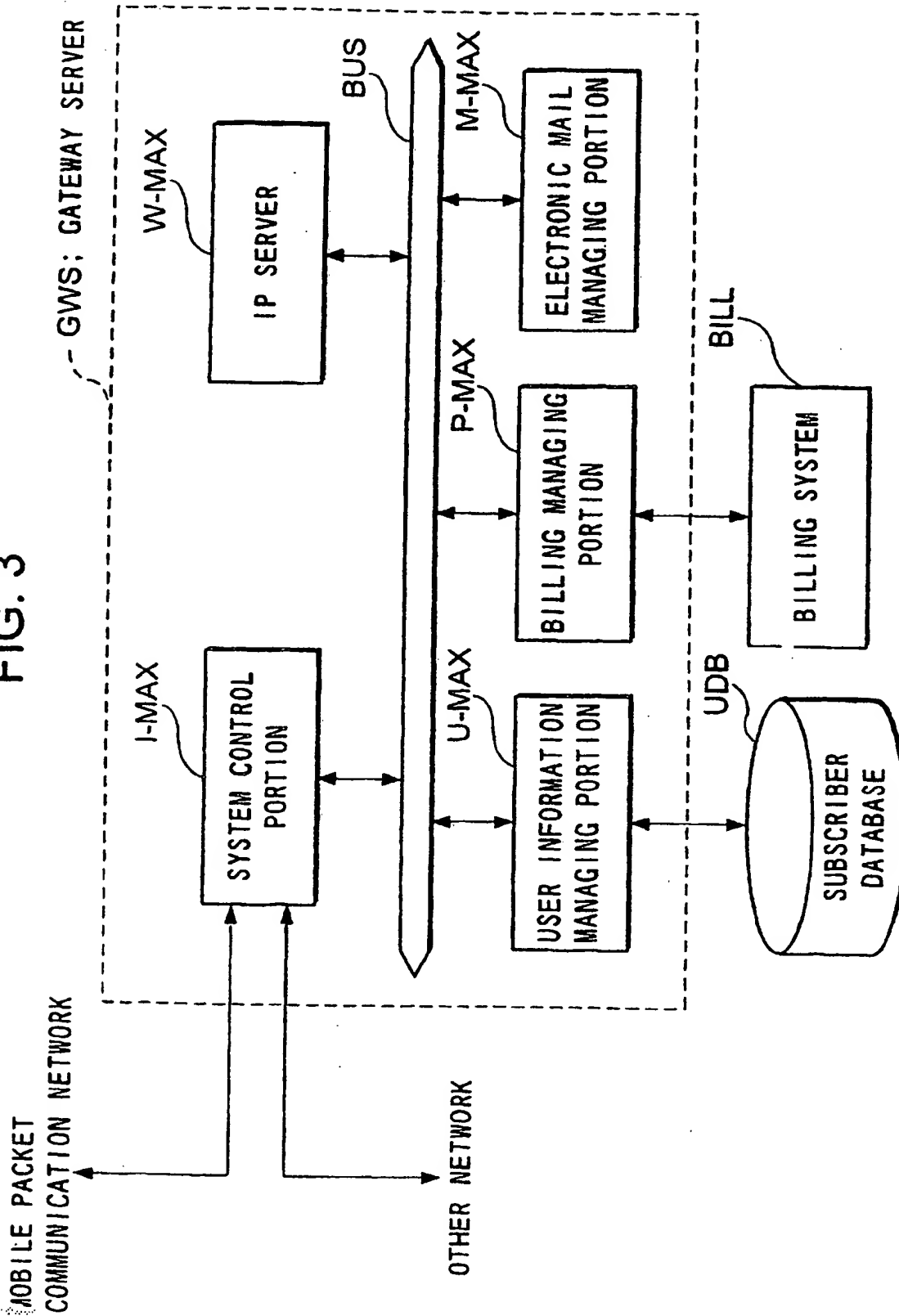


FIG. 4

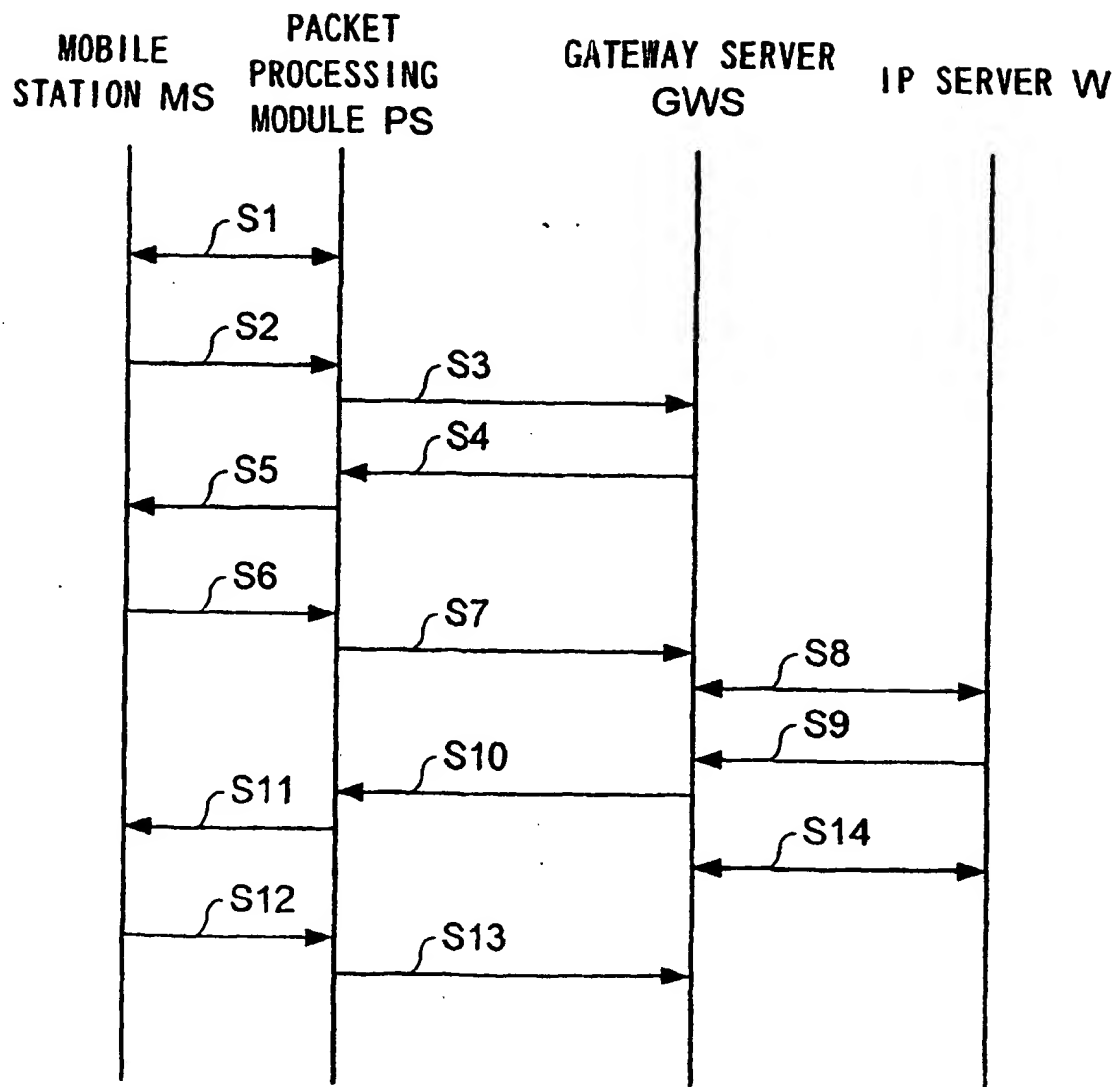


FIG. 5

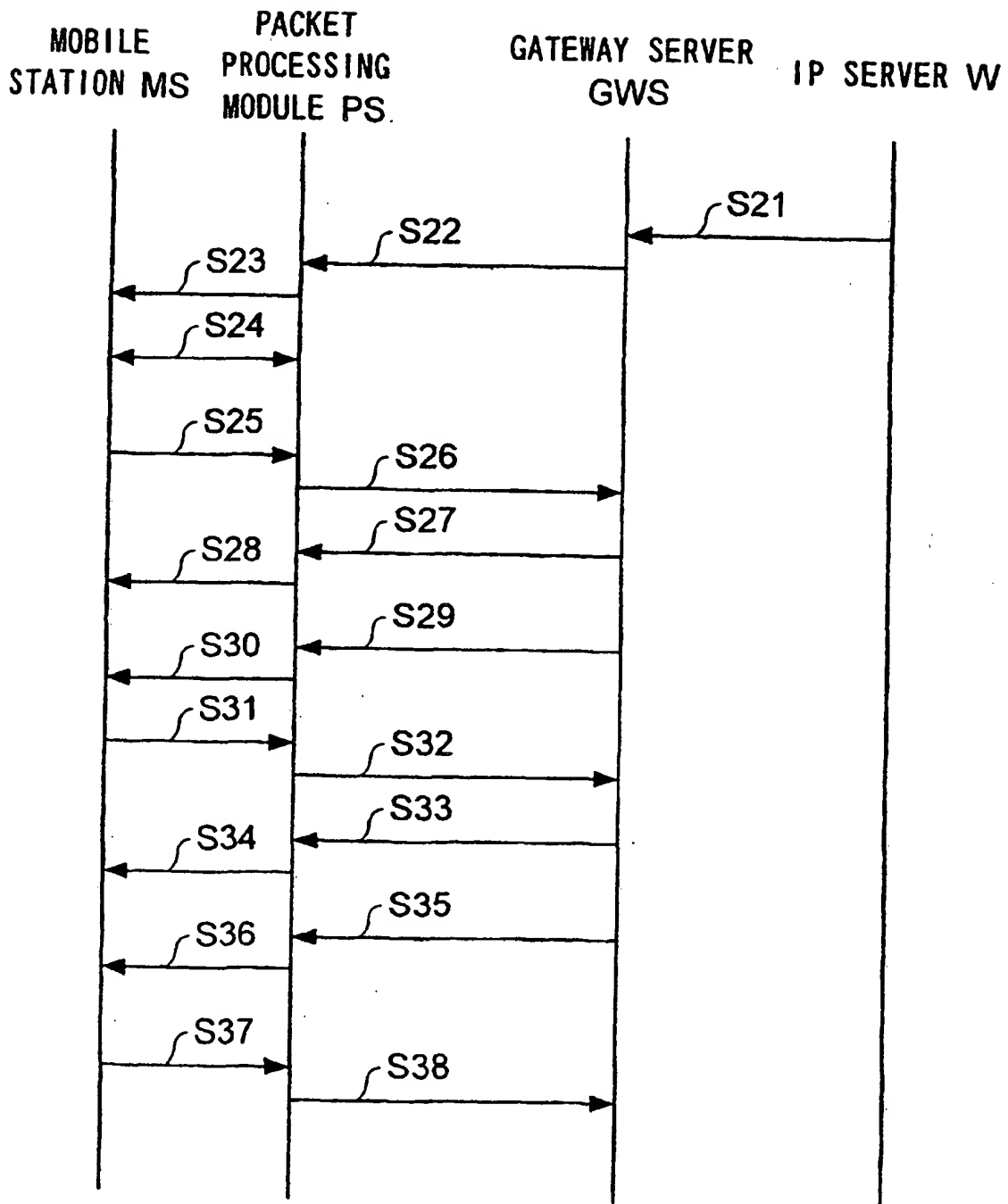


FIG. 6

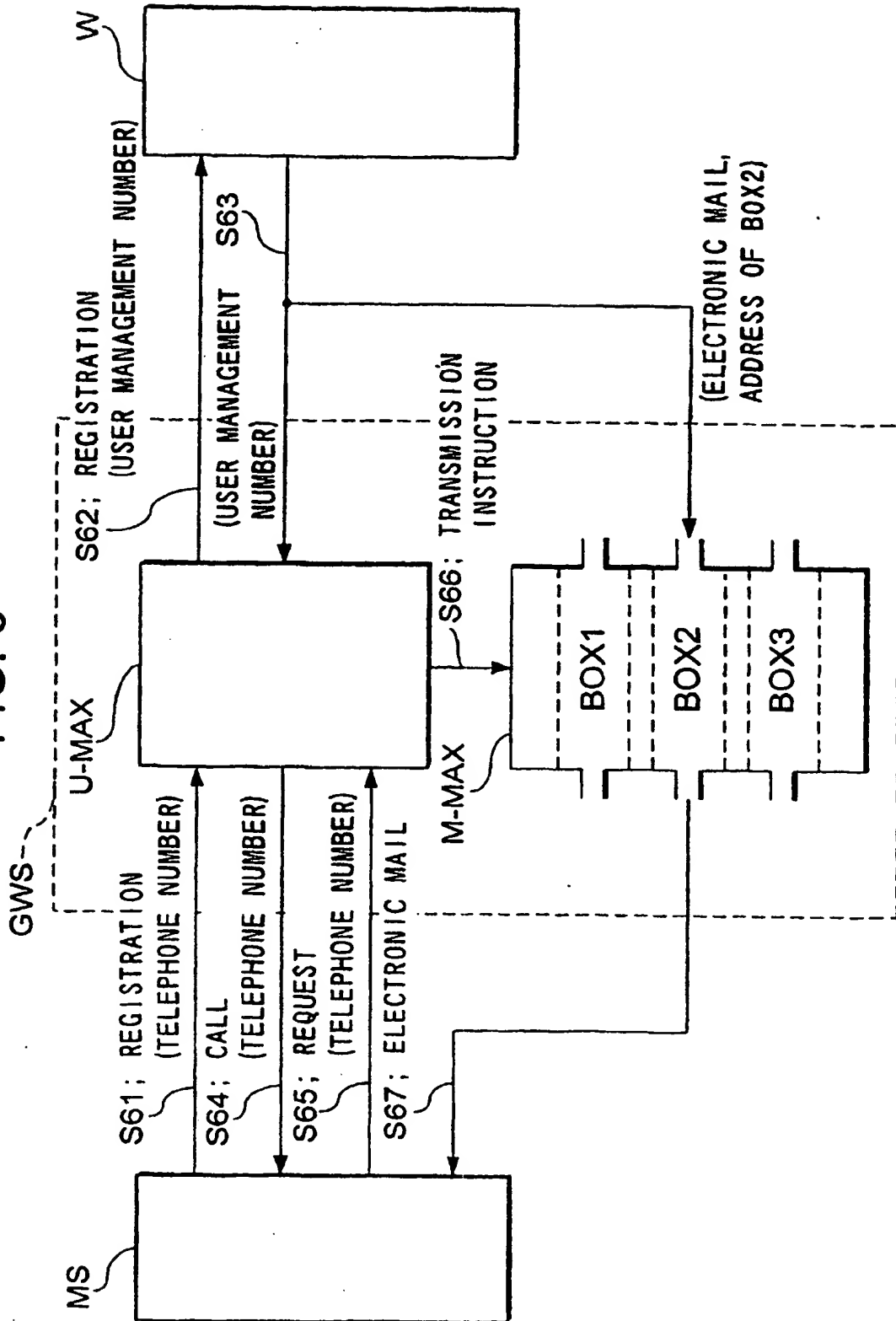


FIG. 7

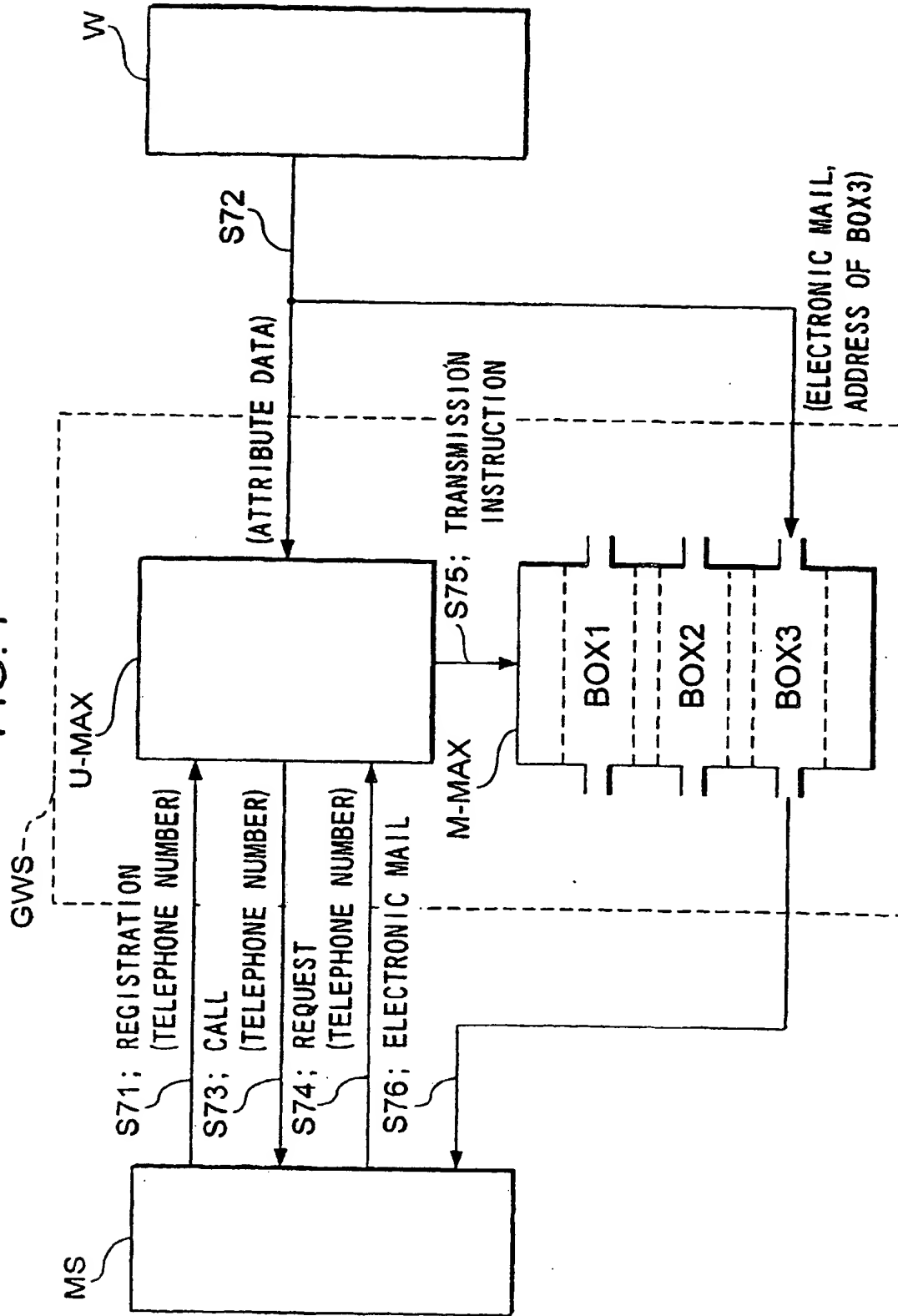


FIG. 8

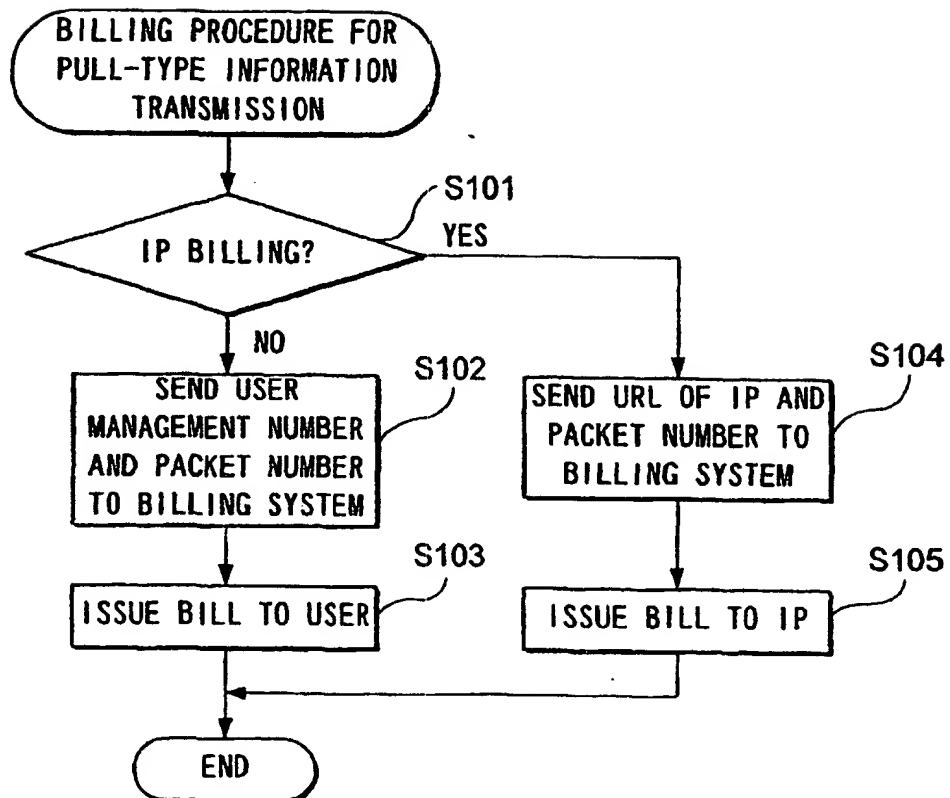


FIG. 9

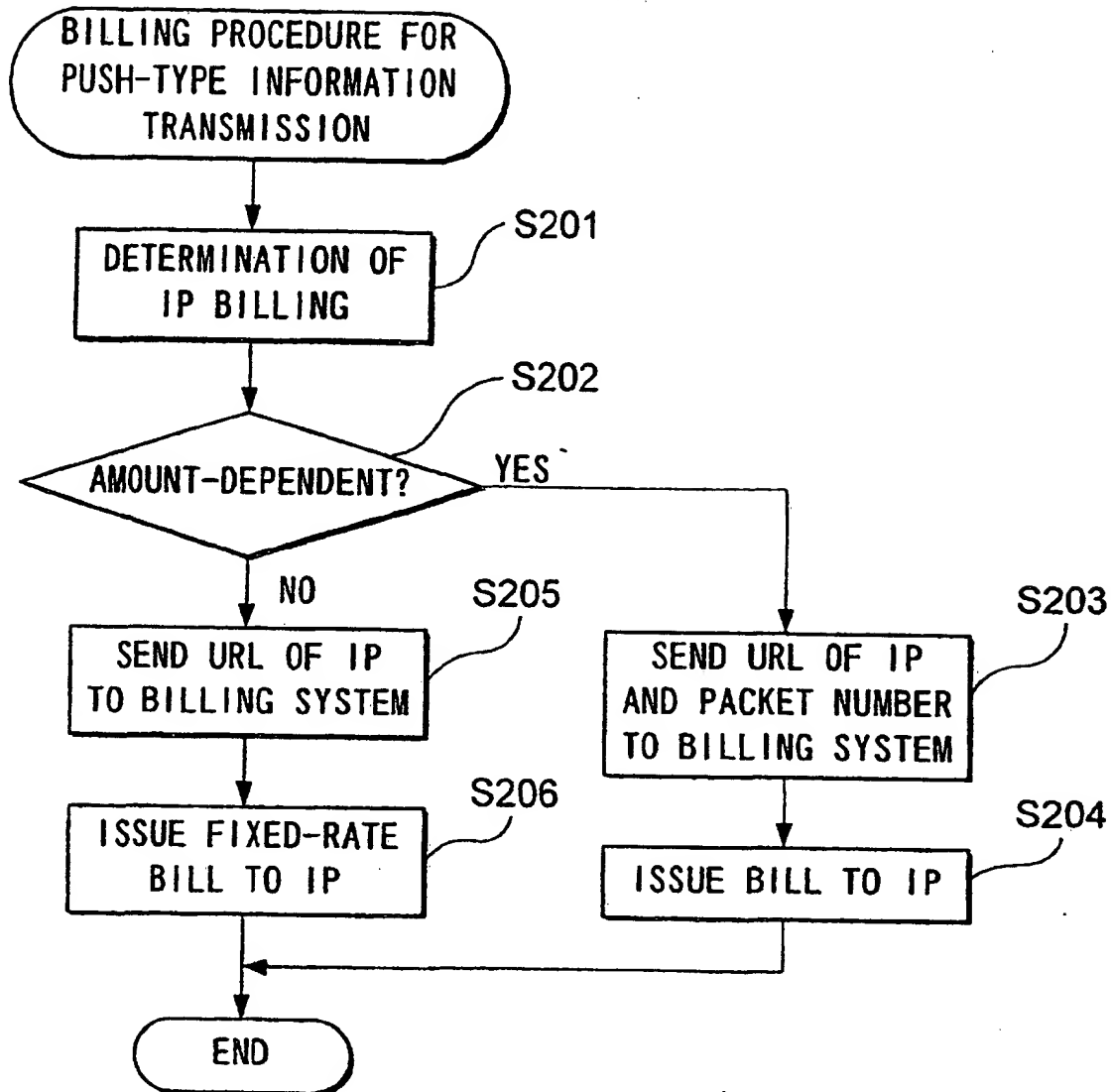
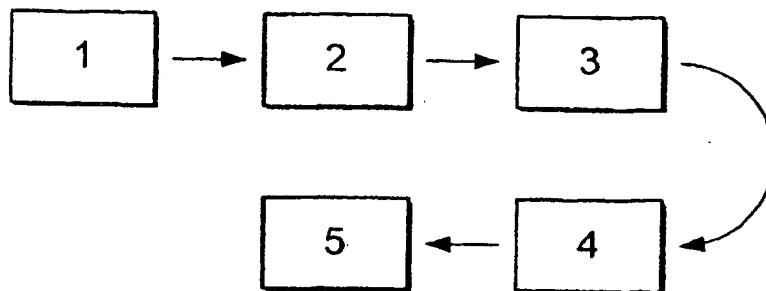


FIG. 10



1~5; SEQUENCE OF DIALOG SCREENS DISPLAYED WHEN USER PERFORMS REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

4; REGISTRATION SCREEN PROVIDED BY GATEWAY SERVER

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP99/04637

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER Int.Cl. ⁶ H04L 12/14 H04L 12/58 G06F 13/00 354 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) Int.Cl. ⁶ H04L 12/14 H04M 11/00 H04L 12/28 G06F 13/00 351-357 H04L 12/54-12/58 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1926-1999 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-1999 Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-1999 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-1999 Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) JICST (JOIS) INSPEC (DTALOG)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	JP, 5-268216, A (FUJITSU LIMITED), 15 October, 1993 (15.10.93), column 1, lines 2-23; Fig. 1 & US, 5508817, A	4-7
Y		11-13
A		1-3, 9, 10
X	column 3, lines 41-43	8
Y	JP, 5-207029, A (FUJI XEROX CO., LTD.), 13 August, 1993 (13.08.93), column 1, lines 2-15; Fig. 1 (Family: none)	11-13
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" documents of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "Z" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 25 November, 1999 (25.11.99)		Date of mailing of the international search report 14 December, 1999 (14.12.99)
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Japanese Patent Office		Authorized officer
Facsimile No.		Telephone No.